

April 18, 2015  
ACTR Board of Directors Meeting Notes  
Washington, DC

Directors present: Richard Brecht, Tony Brown, Robert Channon, Dan Davidson, Evgeny Dengub, Ruth Edelman, Elena Farkas, Peter Merrill, Lee Roby, Karen Evans-Romaine, Tom Garza, Paavo Husen, Diane Nemeč-Ignashev, Cindy Ruder, Betsy Sandstrom, Jane Shuffelton, Alla Smyslova, Jim Sweigert, Mara Sukholutskaya, Mark Trotter, Natasha Ushakova, Irwin Weil, Michele Whaley, and Irina Dubinina by Skype.

### **Approval of Minutes**

The minutes of the January 9, 2015, ACTR Board of Directors Meeting in Vancouver, BC, were unanimously approved.

### **Announcements**

President Betsy Sandstrom welcomed two new members to the ACTR Board of Directors: Irina Dubinina and Evgeny Dengub. Sandstrom also congratulated Lee Roby on her participation in the Second Worldwide Festival of the Russian Language, which took place in St. Petersburg in November 2014 with national student and teacher finalists of the MAPRIAL country tour from 60 countries. Roby reminded the Board that Sandstrom's student, Joseph Doran, earned the second-place prize in the student category.

### **Treasurer's Report**

Treasurer Cynthia Ruder submitted the Treasurer's report.

ACTR is recovering from a deficit while bolstering the cash fund and the Pushkin Fund.

Ruder asked committees to submit budgets with 2014-2015 expenses and predictions for future budgets. Such predictions will allow ACTR to track data for both trends and budgets. In addition, committees must request approval in advance of expenditures.

ACTR members can donate to five different funds. Ruder will provide codes for each of those funds.

ACTR is now covering costs for the April Board Meetings. American Councils offers ACTR a subsidy for flights through Delta Frequent Flyer miles, charging ACTR only for the fees for that travel. ACTR covers mileage for those who drive. Ruder asked Board members to consider where they can economize for future meetings: taking a shuttle

rather than a cab, staying in a hotel only when necessary for flights, and sharing rooms to save money. Ruder will develop a hotel policy for Board meetings. She asked Directors to remember that ACTR operates on a shoestring, dependent mostly on dues. Meanwhile, while contests pay for themselves, awards are a free service to the community and could increase expenditures as they expand. Ruder asked members to consider ways to remain within the budget.

Discussion on methods of economizing included a suggestion for virtual meetings, but several commented that Directors make many connections and even work together outside of the official business part of the meeting. The regular meeting date may need to be set based on lower season hotel rates. The mid-April Board meeting seems to be a good time for attendance.

Questions arose about how donations have been directed. Ruder is working with the AC Finances Department to make sure that donations to ACTR and contests are coded and directed appropriately and that donors receive receipts. ACTR may be able to thank donors on the website. The management of the Pushkin and Claire Walker funds is handled by a financial management firm working with American Councils.

Dan Davidson reminded Board members that there has not yet been an official request to Lifetime members to contribute a one-time donation to support ACTR. Ruder will pursue the suggestion to write a letter on behalf of the Board with Tom Garza and Betsy Sandstrom.

### **Membership Secretary Report**

Robert Channon spoke for Membership Secretary Bonny Einstein, who was unable to attend the meeting. Channon shared the report and noted that Einstein does not necessarily have access on the current membership site to separate out categories. It is also difficult to distinguish between different years of membership with the current site. The new ACTR site may make it easier to track members for specific years, acknowledge lifetime members, delineate other categories of membership, and also offer an automatic receipt for dues payments. Currently, new passwords create additional entries for individual members. The membership form will be updated for the *ACTR Letter* and for the new ACTR site. Sandstrom and Ruder underscored that ACTR Board members are deeply thankful to Einstein for volunteering as Membership Secretary.

### **Report on ACTR Academic Programs**

Dan Davidson

The ACTR Board has worked to help students learn Russian more effectively and succeed in the overseas environment for 30 years. That work has affected many of the programs that American Councils directs.

Participant numbers have declined slightly in the recent spring semester, both in government and RLAS programs. The programs are operating under new standards, including cultural and linguistic competencies. Overseas study is a heavy burden for students, for whom there are both low- and high-stakes encounters. They must use many different strategies before speaking Russian. Students have a permanent sense of cognitive overload. They need a great deal of support. The ACTR Board has often played a critical role in interventions. It may be useful to invite program directors to the next ACTR Board Meeting to report. While there have been changes in pre-departure and testing, the model of small-group training has not changed. The emphasis is on self-management, requiring weekly language utilization reports. As students have strong opinions about group dynamics in language study, the groups and training are constantly changing slightly. The peer tutors are teachers-in-training, rather than casual peers, close to the age of students.

Now even second-level students can take at least one content course in their second major, with almost no limitation on courses and fields. At the third level, students take the courses for a grade, writing the same papers and tests as their Russian peers.

Integrated homestays are a prized asset. Families are matched across twelve different parameters. Internships and volunteer opportunities are coordinated separately. All flagship students make use of the on-line language utilization reports; these focus on speaking events, successes, and reflection. The reports allow for further intervention in case of non-speaking issues.

Funding has changed. Title VI added about two million dollars, still 38% below five years ago. Title VIII has just been refunded. Fulbright-Hays is a funder of the SLT, and might be able to add broader funding for graduate student and teacher support.

Test outcomes are now available for NSLI-Y, open in seven critical languages for fifteen through seventeen-year olds, both as a summer program and academic year program. The Kazan program shifted to Moldova and is now scheduled in Narva,

Estonia for 2015, where there are direct links with St. Petersburg. The program formerly did not take novice-level speakers, but NSLI-Y included rank beginners because of languages (such as Farsi and Urdu) that are not represented by high school language programs in the United States. Results are strong, even for beginners. Some move into the Intermediate level. Those who spend a year overseas can go straight into upper-level classes at the university. Outreach needs to help students pick programs where language proficiency is assessed and valued. Strong programs are adding higher levels for students who enter with greater proficiency. State schools are requiring projected learning outcomes for courses as a result of accreditation demands.

**The CLS Program:** operates in 13 critical regions, all operated by American Councils. The Russian one will be in Nizhnii Novgorod and Vladimir. CLS cannot operate in a capital city. Numbers have risen for the CLS program, and students who enter at Intermediate Low are leaving the program at Intermediate High, or Advanced threshold. The gains are substantial for the cohort over just a summer; probably the effect of the interventions.

The **RLASP** program is working across Eurasia. Students coming after third year Russian are typically entering at Intermediate Mid. After the semester, students achieve the Advanced threshold. Those who decide to change to a full year make even more significant achievements.

Students overseas on the Flagship program are now in Almaty. The location changed because of the donor agency; because military students are no longer going to Russia, neither can the the Flagship programs. The Almaty setting offers benefits to students that are not possible in Russia, including internships in a nuclear facility. Several current students are working in journalism. There is great freedom, interest and warmth for students. Some students are taking Kazakh, which they may continue in the US. Students are excited about being able to use their Russian outside Russia.

Flagship Program: entering students must be at least a 2 in two areas, with no lower than a 1+ in their third area. The success rate is at 92% producing level 3s or higher. No other American language program is achieving the same results. Many students are achieving a Listening 3+ even though it's a very difficult test.

Students return from NSLI-Y and encourage others to apply because of their experiences and their new abilities. Unfortunately, there is no consideration at all of students' Russian language ability for the first round. Davidson concurred with comments that there should be more direction toward RLASP. CLS and NSLI-Y summer programs have held to the zero-admit rule in order to improve access for students from a variety of geographical areas, meaning that many highly-qualified Russian language students are not being accepted. Meanwhile, academic year programs are more likely to accept students with language experience.

### **MAPRIAL Congress**

Dan Davidson asked for the Board to support a resolution about ACTR participation in the MAPRIAL conference. A number of Board members have applied. We would like to designate five ACTR Board Members as delegates to help set an agenda for the next five years.

Tom Garza moved that the Board nominate Dan Davidson to represent ACTR and designate five total delegates with two reserve for the MAPRIAL Congress in Granada. MAPRIAL would support registration, housing and travel to Madrid for the five voting members. Individuals may have to cover personal costs to Granada.

Members of the delegation: Tony Brown, Bob Channon, Dan Davidson, Irina Dubinina, Elena Farkas, Betsy Sandstrom, Jane Shuffelton, Alla Smyslova, Mara Sukholutskaya, Natasha Ushakova.

The motion passed unanimously.

Davidson announced that at the pre-Congress session, the Presidium of MAPRIAL awarded the Medal for Distinguished Service to Betsy Sandstrom. They will convey that medal to Sandstrom at the Congress.

### **Report from The American Councils Board of Trustees**

Dick Brecht reported for the AC Board of Trustees.

Dick Brecht announced that Irwin Weill is now ACTR's official representative to the Board of Trustees. Two former ambassadors have rejoined the Board of Trustees: Richard Morningstar and John Ordway. The current meeting involved strategic planning

for the next five-year period, involving a broader look at global education and a broader mission. Questions include how far American Councils can or should extend beyond current activities and how to set business plans with concrete proposals and budgets. Weill works to focus on academic issues.

Davidson added that the strategic plan is very flexible and nimble. Brecht spoke about how the American-Russian Center is working to support funding for research and development of the entire Russian field. The American Academy of Arts and Sciences will soon announce a national commission on language in the United States.

Ruder and Brecht commented on how helpful it is to have Weill and Sandstrom attending the Board of Trustees meetings as representatives of ACTR. It is possible for the Board of Trustees to be focused on data-driven issues and the tyranny of numbers. Davidson commented that ACTR's mission and small-budget projects may define the direction of huge projects that American Councils may undertake in the future. The impact of ACTR's programs are often difficult to measure. Sandstrom said that her impression is that it is clear that the Trustees appreciate the reports from the different departments at American Councils and the effect that programs have had.

### **The Committee on College and Pre-College Russian**

John Schillinger was unable to attend, but sent a request for wording to ask institutions how they assess linguistic achievement at the end of their programs. Dick Brecht has been working on accreditation of language programs in the United States, involving measurable achievement that each program can offer; for instance, to be accredited, the program would need to provide data that 80% of students leaving the third year reach an Intermediate Mid level in reading and speaking.

### **Summer Language Teacher Program**

Diane Nemec-Ignashev, Karen Evans-Romaine, Tony Brown, Elena Farkas

Diane Nemec-Ignashev reported that the program unexpectedly moved to St. Petersburg while the SLT Committee was working to make changes in the Moscow program. The SLT committee does not now know who has applied for the next program or anything about the applicants. There is a need to clarify ACTR's involvement, because while the grant is a small one in AC terms, it is a large one for the Russian

field. One problem is that participants do not necessarily stay connected with ACTR. Another area of concern is that the Resident Director is typically not in place to work with academic issues but only with logistical and residential ones.

Discussion: perhaps the ACTR SLT Committee should connect with those in AC's Outbound Programs who are writing grants. Outbound Programs must satisfy funders and recruit a diverse group of high school and college teachers and grad students, while understanding that the goal is professional training. Our mission at ACTR is not to run the program, but there should be input on professional development. How is the new portfolio requirement going to help teachers going forward? Are teachers learning not only language, but how to teach more effectively?

While there is great satisfaction with the entire program, there are ongoing issues with daily structure and content in the classes. Increased demands on teachers and a shrinking field of secondary Russian programs mean that teachers can't always commit six weeks of summer to such a program.

Davidson responded that the good news is that the Department of Education has refunded SLT in its new structure. Change cannot happen as quickly as Board members might like, but the current administration is supportive of professional development for K-12 teachers and for under-represented groups. The DoE was in favor of a move to a pedagogical institution, hence the change to Herzen from MGU, though ACTR would have preferred to keep it in Moscow. One idea was to hold programs in both places because of different needs of secondary and postsecondary instructors. Rossotrudnichestvo seems to be ready to support training for teachers, possibly giving AC the chance to run two programs for different group needs. Meanwhile, the SLT program selection is ongoing: currently there are twelve candidates and four alternates following an extensive effort to reach secondary teachers.

Davidson underscored the need for ACTR to continue participation in the SLT Committee. It is costly to add a faculty member to the program in addition to the Resident Director, but perhaps ACTR Board members could join on a part-time basis.

Discussion: if there are to be two programs, perhaps grad students could attend during the academic year, unlinking their needs for advising from those of K-12 teachers'

needs. K-12 teachers need pictures, photographs, videos, and “stuff” that they gain from being on site.

Discussion followed about the difference between Masters’ degrees and Bachelors’ degrees in Russia, study program timelines for grad students, and the new eight-month program that the Boren Fellowship recognizes.

### **Report from RGGU and the American Studies Center**

Tony Brown and Irwin Weil announced the May conference at RGGU theme: War in the American Culture in Context. Those who would like to participate should plan ahead for 2016. This year will be the tenth anniversary of the American Studies Center in Moscow. Irwin Weill shared that the American Studies Center is the fulfillment of a dream to have a place to study America in Russia. It truly has given young Russians a realistic picture of the US, as well as an opportunity for Americans to see themselves from the outside.

Dick Brecht encouraged Weill to speak about his upcoming memoir, *From the Cincinnati Reds to the Moscow Reds*. Farkas will post an announcement in the *ACTR Letter* that the book is available through Amazon.

## **REPORTS ON CONTESTS AND AWARDS**

### **a. Olympiada of Spoken Russian/OLYMPIADA International Olympiada**

Natasha Ushakova spoke about the Moscow Olympiada; Mark Trotter was overseeing his own Olympiada while the Board meeting was in progress.

Ushakova accompanied students to Moscow. Students did not get to present reports on arrival as expected. Only fifteen students got to present; the majority were from Belorussia, Estonia, and Israel, having emigrated only a few years before.

Announcements were all in Russian, going on for upwards of 30 minutes. The organizers expected everyone to understand Russian at a high level. It was not clear why some students earned prizes or why the American delegation was limited.

Additionally, students were shown pictures and asked where specific monuments or stores were located. The judging seemed not aware of education in the US or other



places; the questions were random. Students spent eleven hours in a building without air conditioning and with limited wifi. The American group was welcomed and respected, but the students did not feel that they were competing in earnest, given the large numbers of native speakers in attendance in Moscow. Ushakova felt that she had to follow up at every turn.

### **b. National Russian Essay Contest (NREC)**

Co-chair Paavo Husen reported that this was the second year of collaboration with Evgeny Dengub and John Rock. The first round of essays was complete at the Board meeting date. The goal was to increase participation by ten percent, and the Essay Contest was close. Husen contacted every school on Schillinger's list, without any responses outside those already participating. The number of schools and teachers were unchanged, but there were some interesting additions, including Central High School in Tennessee, another in Nashville, and two new schools in Chicago. These schools will provide new participants in the future. Husen plans to write to all the math and science schools in the nation to announce next year's NREC.

### **c. National Post-Secondary Russian Essay Contest (NPSREC)**

Lisa Choate spoke about challenges with the second round of the NPSREC contest in Moscow this year. Mailing essays was problematic; one box of essays spent a week in Ohio because of security issues. The essays are written on all sizes and colors of paper, and they must be individually copied for readers. There should be a single format for the NPSREC. An electronic submission would be simpler and save money on mailing, meanwhile making copies of the essays in Moscow. Another issue is the health of the manager and the other essay contest readers.

Discussion involved the ways that students write the essays: they could type under a proctor's guidance, if autocorrect and internet access are turned off. Otherwise, postsecondary institutions could require students to hand-write essays and then scan them for ACTR. The difference between typing and handwriting could affect the outcome for students. One suggestion for the NPSREC is to use the standard form that the NREC already does first, then scan and send the essays electronically to the Moscow office for copying.

Chair Tony Brown will take suggestions for the next year. This year there were 1087 students from 68 institutions, up from 1004 from 57 institutions. The topic was “A Very Interesting Day in My Life.” Brown said that the 2015 contest added eleven institutions including Franklin and Marshall, Barnard, Brown, Case Western and Missouri University of Science and Technology to the list. The essays are in Moscow under review.

Discussion concerned the list of schools and how to connect with Russian programs nationwide; the list is skewed toward private, elite programs.

#### **d. Russian Scholar Laureate Award (RSLA)**

Natasha Ushakova submitted her report.

The number of schools decreased, but Ushakova will send invitations to schools who are not yet part of the group. Schools with over 100 students can have two Scholars.

#### **e. Post-Secondary Russian Scholar Laureate Award (PSRSLA)**

Alla Smyslova reported.

The PSRSLA added 20 programs this year, with 62 nominating institutions. Twelve submitted nominees for the first time. Smyslova posted on SEELANGS, and then John Schillinger posted the announcement on his list. The PSRSLA stayed within budget; Smyslova assures that every nominating institution has at least one ACTR member. Several memberships renewed, and nine new members joined after submitting a nomination. One program stopped submitting nominations because of the expense of the membership. Two programs submitted second-time nominees. Programs have oversight. Smyslova thanked Bonny Einstein and John Schillinger for their support of her efforts in membership and outreach. She will work to sustain the level of participation; nominating schools truly appreciate this opportunity.

#### **f. ACTR Service Award**

Jane Shuffelton, Bill Rivers, Elena Farkas

Jane Shuffelton reminded the Directors that the Board had been proud to present the ACTR Service Award for lifetime service to Dan Davidson in San Antonio at ACTFL in

November. Many commented that the award was long overdue. Shuffelton requested nominations for the next award.

## **REPORTS ON PUBLICATIONS**

### *Russian Language Journal*

Dan Davidson reported that RLJ issues have been on time; it is available online immediately for members or with a year's delay for non-members. Board members applauded the good news that the entire *RLJ* is now on MLA and JStore.

### *ACTR Letter*

Editor Elena Farkas reported that the anniversary issue was delayed; the winter issue will be coming out soon as well. Unfortunately there are currently no submissions for the April issue. It's impossible to force submissions; even those who promise articles are often late or drop out. Farkas requested that Board members write about their programs and activities. One suggestion: that Farkas post a solicitation for the *Letter* on SEELANGS.

Other ideas for submissions: request reflections from participants in programs – from SLT participants, from International and regular Olympiada student, parent, teacher and judge participants, especially if pictures could be added to those submissions. Board Members could also reach out to non-ACTR member programs for information on the programs specifically, to classroom and event activities.

Perhaps Board Member Nina Bond could help increase visibility on social media.

The *ACTR Letter* budget is on track.

Dan Davidson announced a June event in connection with the 40th-anniversary celebration at the Russian Tea Room. It will be a fundraising gala. Leo Hendry, the keynote speaker, is the former CEO of ITT. AC will recognize Senator Bill Bradley on his 25th anniversary of his cooperation.

## **Report on the revision of Russian Specific Standards**

Jane Shuffelton, Tom Garza, Peter Merrill

Chair Jane Shuffelton spoke about the Fourth Edition of the World Readiness Standards for Learning Languages publication by the National Standards Collaborative Board. It is most convenient and cost-effective for ACTFL to distribute the publication.

ACTR must still renew its endorsement of the Standards. Earlier, credit to the Collaborative Board had been left out of the publication. The ACTR Board of Directors must still officially renew its sponsorship.

The update is the equivalent of the original generic standards. The language-specific standards have not yet been updated. The Russian-specific standards are ahead of the field in that they are complete. An order for the generic standards includes the most current updates to the electronic form of the fourteen language-specific standards. As the language-specific standards are updated, holders of the generic standards will have the right to download revisions as they occur. There are many variations of orders: hard copy plus one language-specific standard, e-book plus any number of language-specific standards, and so on. The Russian-specific update is not yet published. However, the update of the generic standards shows critical changes, including that the indicators are by proficiency range.

Shuffelton motioned that the ACTR Board of Directors agrees to officially endorse the new World Readiness Standards for Learning Languages. Bob Channon seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

### **2015 Nominations Committee**

Betsy Sandstrom announced that Evgeny Dengub, Karen Evans-Romaine and Lee Roby agreed to serve on the 2015 Nominations Committee.

Jane Shuffelton requested that the Board continue to balance pre-college and post-secondary teachers, and not tilt further toward the post-secondary side. Currently, there are ten pre-college and fifteen post-secondary members.

### **Discussion Items**

– **ACTR Website** – Karen Evans-Romaine

Chair Karen Evans-Romaine commented on challenges working on the website. There is only one person working on the American Councils website and video, as well as one

person working on social networking. It would be impossible to commit any time to the ACTR website until October. Suggestions included waiting until October, for a project that would take more than a year, and that members should begin writing content, starting small and building slowly with a system like Wordpress.

The Board understands well the problems with the current site, which was actually only a database. A third-party organization created the database under proprietary software without input from ACTR, leading to the situation that the ACTR site faces.

Much discussion followed on the problems with the current ACTR membership site, the needs for the website and how to achieve goals of the Board. Members volunteered support: design, content, and photographs for the site. Applause broke out when Evgeny Dengub offered to create a mockup site for ACTR on Weebly.

**– ACTR Budget and Finance – Cindy Ruder**

**– ACTR Membership Rates/RLJ – Dan Davidson, Bill Rivers, Cindy Ruder, Elena Farkas, Alla Smyslova**

**– Alternate Dues Proposal – Bob Channon**

Bob Channon brought charts to discuss the decision the Board took in San Antonio to change the dues structure. The new rate structure might discourage new members. Jane Shuffelton motioned to reconsider the dues structure. The motion passed unanimously. Channon shared dues information from other organizations and a new proposal that would raise dues by ten dollars across the board and add \$200 to the lifetime membership dues. Channon made a motion to substitute his new proposal for the one that was passed in San Antonio. Discussion followed on institutional and library memberships or subscriptions, sustaining donations, and lifetime memberships. Channon suggested that some of the current expenses will decline. Ruder commented that ACTR is currently in the black. Brecht called the question. The question was seconded, and the Board accepted, with two abstentions. The motion to adopt Channon's dues structure with amendments carried with five abstentions. Jane Shuffelton moved and then withdrew a motion to add \$20.00 to the current dues schedule. Richard Brecht moved to amend that motion, adding \$10.00 to the current membership dues across the board, while adding a category for sustaining members. The new dues for 2016 would therefore be \$15 for students (without RLJ), \$35 for

retired 40 assistant professors, lecturers, pre-college teachers and independent scholars, and \$45 for associate and full professors. The motion carried unanimously. Channon moved to change life membership to \$1,000. The motion carried unanimously. To come is a sustaining membership set at \$100 or more.

Some discussion followed about tying a request for sustaining memberships to the 40th anniversary.

## **NEW BUSINESS**

Both Sandstrom and Natasha Ushakova and Mara Sukholutskaya will be holding Startalk programs.

Plans for next year's spring meeting: Ruder said that October to March is "down time" for Washington for hotels. Room prices typically cost \$398 at the Quincy in April, whereas the same rooms run from \$180-220 in the low season. For the next meeting, however, Board members will be sharing rooms to bring costs down. The April date offers the best attendance, but in the future the Board meetings might change based on the new AATSEEL meeting dates. The Board agreed to hold the 2016 meeting at the same time in April.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:42 pm.

## **MEETING DATES FOR NOVEMBER 2015 JANUARY 2016, AND SPRING 2016**

**ACTFL** –November 20-22, 2015, San Diego Convention Center, San Diego, CA

**ASEEES (AAASS)** – November 19-22, 2015 Philadelphia Marriott, Philadelphia, PA

**AATSEEL** - January 7-10, 2016, AT&T Executive Education and Conference Center, University of Texas at Austin, Austin, TX

**ACTR Board of Directors** – Spring 2016, Washington, DC

